7. AREOPAGITICUS

INTRODUCTION

The *Areopagiticus* is generally thought to have been composed between 358 and 352, either just before, during, or just after the disastrous Social War (357–355) in which Athens was left with a weakened naval empire after her stronger allies, Chios, Cos, Rhodes, and Byzantium, gained their independence from the Confederacy. The positive and confident mood of the work (7.1–3) suggests a date before the war, perhaps 358/7,[1] but the speech also raises issues of particular poignancy for the conflict and its outcome. The speech is one that expresses strong dissatisfaction with the current democracy and espouses a return to the *politeia patrios,* or "ancestral constitution," as a solution to the city's problems and as a guarantee of its supremacy. In particular, Isocrates urges Athens to give back to the Areopagus Court its historical authority to maintain the laws and to supervise the behavior of citizens.

This political program was extremely conservative. The Areopagus Court was founded before Solon as a powerful, aristocratic council of state to ensure the preservation of Athens' laws (cf. Arist., *Ath. Pol.* 3.6, 4.4, 8.4) and to hear and punish cases of homicide. Its membership consisted of all individuals who had held the annual office of archon, of which there were nine each year. The Court may have also included a powerful subgroup of fifty-one citizens, known as the *ephetai,* who heard the legal cases (see Arist., *Politics* 1273b35–1274a7 and Wallace

[1] See Jaeger 1940 and Wallace 1986: 77 and notes for summary of the debate.

1985: 12). In 462/1 BC Ephialtes reformed the Court in response to its mismanagement of the city's affairs. It seems that he took away the special privileges of its members and gave to the people the guardianship of the laws.[2] In the fourth century, the Court dealt with cases of homicide, wounding, arson, and various religious offenses.[3]

Toward the end of the fifth century, the Areopagus became a focus for conservative, and even oligarchical, ideology as espoused by individuals such as Theramenes, Xenophon, Plato, and Timotheus. Isocrates' articulation of Areopagus ideology in this work is somewhat idiosyncratic, for it presents a pedagogical ideal both distinct from and complementary to that offered in his other paideutic works, *Against the Sophists* (speech 13) and *Antidosis* (speech 15). If these two works portray the rhetorician as a teacher of the youth of Athens and the larger Greek-speaking world in "philosophy" (i.e., rhetoric[4]) in opposition to the contemporary sophists, the *Areopagiticus* concerns itself above all with the moral instruction to the city as a whole. According to Isocrates, in Solon's time, the Areopagus guarded the laws, educated the young, and oversaw the maintenance of Athens as a democratic state (7.37–38), preventing what the rhetorician caricatures as the corruptions and excesses of the populist democracy. Isocrates now presses for the restoration of the Court as the only institution with the authority and capacity to rehabilitate Athens from the moral decadence that has resulted from the education of the sophists and from the culture of litigation produced by it.

7. AREOPAGITICUS

[1] I suppose many of you are wondering what my intention is in coming forward to speak about our security as if Athens were in danger, or its affairs were in a perilous state, or it did not possess more than two hundred triremes, enjoy peace in its territory, and rule the sea. [2] Indeed, our city has many allies who will readily help, if the

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[2] The founding of the Areopagus Court to hear the case of Orestes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* pays tribute to the reforms.

[3] Wallace 1985: 106–110.

[4] On the meaning of "philosophy," see the Introduction to Isocrates.

need arises, and many more paying contributions and carrying out its orders. In this situation, one might say that it would be reasonable for us to have confidence that we are far from danger and that our enemies should be afraid and take thought for their own security. [3] You,[5] as I know, accept this argument and despise my address, for you expect to rule all Greece by this power.

Yet I fear for just these reasons. I see cities that think their circumstances are best making the worst decisions, and those which are particularly confident soon finding themselves in the greatest dangers. [4] The reason for this is that no good or evil comes to mankind of its own accord; wealth and power produce and are accompanied by senselessness (*anoia*) and lack of restraint (*akolasia*), while poverty and humble circumstances bring moderation and restraint.

[5] Accordingly, it is difficult to determine which of these circumstances one would prefer to leave to his children. We would find that affairs generally improve when they appear to be bad, but when they seem better they generally change for the worse. [6] I can produce the greatest number of examples from the situations of private citizens, which undergo changes most frequently; but more important and better known to my audience is what happened to us and to the Spartans. We became the leaders of Greece after Athens had been overtaken by the barbarians because of our fear for the future and our attention to our affairs,[6] but when we thought we had invincible power, we were nearly enslaved.[7] [7] The Spartans rose long ago from base and humble cities,[8] and controlled the Peloponnesus because they lived moderately and in a military state, but after this, they were more

[5] Readers of the *Areopagiticus* would have understood "you" as a reference to the Assembly of Athens, in keeping with the fictional setting of the speech.

[6] In the Persian War, the Athenians abandoned their city during the battle of Salamis, when Xerxes destroyed Athens. After the war, Athens assumed leadership of the Delian Confederacy; see 4.71–72 and 6.42–43.

[7] Following the end of the Peloponnesian War, a weakened Athens was nearly destroyed and her citizens reduced to slavery by Sparta's allies. Sparta, however, did not permit Athens to be enslaved due to her service to Hellas; see 8.78 and 105, 15.319, and Xen., *Hellenica* 2.2.19–20.

[8] See 4.61 and 12.253.

arrogant than necessary and when they had gained control of land and sea, they then encountered the same dangers as we.[9]

[8] Anyone who knows that such changes have happened and that such great powers are quickly destroyed and who still trusts present circumstances is extremely foolish, especially as our city is far less prosperous now than at that time, since the Greek's hatred and the Persian king's enmity, which then overcame us, has again been renewed. [9] I don't know whether to suspect that you are not concerned about public affairs, or that you care about them but are so unperceptive that you fail to see the great confusion that has overcome Athens. You certainly seem to be in this condition, for you have lost all the cities in Thrace, have wasted more than a thousand talents to no avail on foreigners,[10] [10] have earned the scorn of the Greeks and the enmity of the barbarians,[11] and moreover, were forced to save the friends of the Thebans, while you lost your own allies.[12] In such conditions, we have twice made sacrifices celebrating the arrival of good news, but when we discuss these matters in the Assembly, we are less serious than men who have achieved all they want.

[11] It makes sense that we act in this way and suffer this result. Nothing can turn out well for those who do not plan well about all aspects of government, but if they have success in some actions, whether through good fortune or through some man's virtue, they soon slip up a little and again find themselves in the same uncertainty (*aporiai*). Anyone could learn this from our own experience, [12] for when all of Greece was in our control after Conon's naval battle and Timotheus' campaign,[13] we were unable to keep our good fortune for

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[9] The Spartan hegemony began in 404 and lasted until the state's defeat at the battle of Leuctra in 371. During this period Athens enjoyed a second naval empire in 387.

[10] During the Social War Athens hired mercenary soldiers; see 8.44–47 and Dem. 4.20.

[11] By "barbarians" Isocrates most probably refers to the Messenians, whom the Thebans had liberated from the Spartans. Dem. 16.9.

[12] Isocrates refers to the city's loss of allies, Chios, Cos, Rhodes, and Byzantium, following the Social War, which ended in 355.

[13] For Timotheus' military successes, see 15.107–126; Timotheus' campaigns took place between 375 and 364.

any time, but we rapidly squandered it away. For we neither have nor do we really seek a government that correctly deals with public affairs.

[13] And yet, we all know that prosperity visits and remains not with those who have cast the finest and largest walls around themselves, nor with those who have gathered together with the largest number of people in the same place, but with those who manage their city in the best and most moderate manner. [14] The soul (*psychē*) of the city is nothing other than its constitution, since it has as much power as the intellect does in the body. For it is this that deliberates in all matters, preserves what is good, and avoids misfortune. Laws, public speakers, and private citizens all necessarily resemble it, and the fortunes of each citizen are determined by the form of constitution they possess. [15] But we think nothing of it when it has been destroyed, nor do we consider how to correct it. Sitting in our shops, we criticize the current situation, and complain that we've never had a worse government under the democracy, but in our actions and thoughts we are fonder of it than of the democracy left by our ancestors.

This ancestral (democracy) is the subject on which I am about to speak and have registered this address. [16] For I find that this would be the only means of averting future dangers and escaping from current evils, if we are willing to restore the democracy which Solon, who was the most democratic ruler, established by legislation, and Cleisthenes, who expelled the tyrants and returned the people to power, originally founded.[14] [17] We would not find a constitution more democratic or more beneficial for the state.[15] The greatest proof is this:

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[14] As archon (594/3), Solon established the city's laws, creating the basis for the democratic constitution. In 507 BC Cleisthenes established a constitution that Aristotle says was similar to Solon's (*Ath. Pol.* 29.3; cf. 41.2), and he subsequently received the unofficial designation "leader of the people" (*Ath. Pol.* 28.4). Where Isocrates makes Cleisthenes directly responsible for the expulsion of the tyrants (Dem. 21.144), Aristotle simply refers to his leadership as coming after the dissolution of the tyrants (*Ath. Pol.* 28.7 and 41.2); also see 15.231–232. Ober (1996: 32–52) argues that the origins of the Athenian democracy lay with the common people rather than the aristocratic leaders like Cleisthenes, whose constitution framed the popular revolution.

[15] See 15.232 for praise of the historical, conservative democracies with which Isocrates allies himself.

those who lived under it, when they had accomplished many fine deeds, won fame from all men, and received the command (*hēgemonia*) from the Greeks, with their consent.[16] In contrast, those who prefer the present constitution are hated by all, have suffered many terrible things, and were just short of undergoing the ultimate disaster.[17] [**18**] How can one praise and be fond of this constitution, which has been the cause of so many previous evils and each year goes from bad to worse? Must one not fear that if such a progression continues, we shall in the end run aground on much harsher circumstances than those we faced then.

[**19**] In order that you do not listen only to summary points but have detailed information when you evaluate these constitutions and make your choice, it is your duty to pay attention to what I say, while I shall try to explain both to you as concisely as possible. [**20**] Those who governed the city in those days did not establish a constitution which only in name was the most populist and the most gentle, while proving to be quite the opposite to those who experienced it, nor one which educated the citizens to regard license (*akolasia*) as democracy, lawlessness (*paranomia*) as freedom, free speech (*parrhēsia*) as equality under the law (*isonomia*), or freedom to do what you want (*exousia*) as happiness (*eudaimonia*),[18] but rather by hating and punishing such men, it made all the citizens better and more moderate.

[**21**] But the greatest contribution to governing Athens well was that, of the two recognized kinds of equality—one which allots the same to everyone and the other which gives each what is appropriate—they were not unaware which was more beneficial. They thought it wrong to regard good and bad citizens as deserving the same, [**22**] and they preferred that equality which honors and punishes each according to what he deserved. Through this they governed the state; they did not allot political offices to all, but chose the citizens who were best and

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[16] For similar statements regarding Athens' deserved hegemony, see, e.g., 4.72, 12.67, 15.233, 294.

[17] After the disastrous battle of Aegospotami in 405, Athens surrendered and came under the tyranny of the Thirty (404/3).

[18] For similar characterizations of fourth-century Athenian democracy, see 15.283 and Plato, *Republic* 560d–561a.

most capable for each task. They expected that others would mirror those who were in charge of public affairs.

[23] Moreover, they considered this constitution to be more populist (*dēmotikōteros*) than that which is based on the casting of lots. In the latter, fortune governs, and often those who desire oligarchy are appointed to receive the offices, while in one based on the selection of the best, the people have the authority to choose those who are most devoted to the current constitution. [24] The reason why the majority accepted this and why offices were not hotly contested was that people had learned to work hard and to be thrifty, and not to neglect their own affairs while having designs on others, nor to manage their own affairs from the public purse, but to help the common interest from one's own resources if the need ever arose. Furthermore, they did not know the incomes from public offices in greater detail than the income from their own affairs. [25] Indeed they so strongly refrained from civic affairs, that it was more difficult at that time to find people willing to undertake public office than it is now to find people not seeking office. They regarded the care of the common interests not as a business, but as a public service;[19] and they did not from the first day watch to see if those who previously held office had omitted any income,[20] but much rather, if they had neglected any matter urgently requiring resolution.

[26] To summarize, they recognized that the people, just like a monarch, must appoint public officials, punish transgressors, and judge disputes and that those who had leisure and possessed adequate means should take care of common interests, as if they were servants; [27] that they should be praised for being just and be pleased with this honor; while those who govern badly should not be excused but should receive the harshest penalties. So how could anyone find a de-

[19] For "liturgy" (*lēitourgia*), see the Glossary. Here, and elsewhere in speech 15, Isocrates broadens the understanding of a liturgy to encompass any service, including the teaching of rhetoric, performed for the overall benefit of the community; see 15.158, 224–226; and Lys. 21.19 for the idea that the best liturgy is good citizenship; also Too 1995: 109–110.

[20] Following his term of office, a magistrate could be called to account in a procedure known as a *euthyna,* particularly over the spending of public money, although generals could be called to account for their actions at any time in their office. Harrison 1971: 14–15, 208–211.

mocracy more secure or more just than this, one which puts the most able people in charge of public matters and makes the people sovereign over these.

[28] Such was the structure of their constitution. It is easy to see from this that they always carried out daily affairs justly and lawfully, for those who made such fine principles for the whole state must necessarily manage smaller matters in the same manner. [29] First of all, as for matters regarding the gods—for it is right to begin with this—they did not worship or perform the celebrations inconsistently or erratically. They did not dispatch three hundred oxen whenever they felt like it,[21] nor did they arbitrarily omit the ancestral sacrifices.[22] They did not sumptuously conduct foreign festivals at which there was feasting, while making the sacrifices required by the holiest of rites on the basis of the lowest contracted price. [30] They made certain of only one thing, that they did not destroy any ancestral custom, or add anything beyond what was customary. They did not think that piety was a matter of great expense, but rather of not changing anything their ancestors had handed down to them. Moreover, they received gifts from the gods not unsteadily or randomly, but at the right moment for working the land and harvesting the crops.

[31] They pursued relationships among themselves in the same manner as this. Not only did they agree about both public affairs and their private lives, but they had as much thought for each other as is necessary for people who are sensible and have a common interest in the fatherland.

Poorer citizens refrained from envying those who had more to the extent [32] that their concern for large households was the same as for their own, for they thought that the prosperity of these entailed their own wealth. Those who possessed property did not look down on those who lived less well, but considered the citizens' poverty as a disgrace to themselves, and assisted them in their distress. They provided farmland at moderate rent to some, sent out some to engage in trade, and presented to others the capital for other enterprises. [33] They did not fear either of two results: losing their whole invest-

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[21] Animal sacrifices were made at public festivals, such as the Great Panathenaia, where Athens' allies and colonies were required to make a contribution. The sacrifice would result in a public feast (see Aristoph., *Clouds* 386).

[22] Cf. 2.20.

ment, or after much trouble, reaping only a part of what they had ventured; but they were as confident about what they had given out as of what they had retained. For they saw that people on trial for breach of contract did not plead for equity[23] but adhered to the laws; [34] that in the trials of others, they did not provide themselves with license to do wrong[24] but were more outraged at thieves than at their victims since they thought that the poor were more greatly harmed than the rich by those who made contracts untrustworthy. This is because if the [rich] stop lending, they will lose only a small amount of income, whereas if the poor are deprived of this half, they find themselves in dire straits. [35] Because of this way of thinking, no one hid his wealth or hesitated to contribute; indeed, they derived greater pleasure from seeing men borrow than paying back the loan. As sensible men should wish, they had both of the following results: they benefited the citizens and put their own wealth to work. This is the essence of good relations among men: the ownership of property was secure for those to whom it rightly belonged, but it was enjoyed in common by all the citizens who needed it.

[36] Perhaps, one might criticize what I've said, because in praising actions which happened at that time, I do not discuss the reason relations among citizens and the management of the state were so good. I think I have said some such thing,[25] but despite this, I shall try to speak more clearly about this matter.

[37] Our ancestors did not put many people in charge of their education (*paideia*) or allow citizens to do what they want once they were inscribed as an adult.[26] Instead, they paid more attention to them at

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[23] Litigants were generally expected to adhere strictly to the laws, but other considerations often entered into their pleadings. Isocrates is here criticizing the litigious culture of contemporary Athens; cf., e.g., 15.42–43. For "equity" (*epieikeia*), see Arist., *Rhetoric* 1372b18, 1374a27, and 1375a31–32.

[24] See 15.142–143.

[25] See above, 20–27.

[26] Upon his eighteenth birthday, a youth underwent a *dokimasia* or scrutiny to ensure that he was of age and therefore eligible to participate in public life; see Arist., *Ath. Pol.* 42.1–2 and MacDowell 1978: 58 and 205–206. Individuals who were to hold public office were also required to undergo *dokimasia* before taking up their office.

that time than when they were children. Our ancestors placed such a premium on moderation (*sōphrosynē*) that they established the Areopagus Council to oversee public order, and only those who were well born and gave evidence of particular virtue and moderation in their lives belonged to it.[27] As a result, it naturally took precedence over the other councils in Greece. [38] One could use what happens today as evidence for the institution in those days. Even now when everything connected with the selection and examination *(dokimasia)*[28] of magistrates is neglected, we can see those who are insufferable in other matters hesitate to show their true nature when they enter the Areopagus and abide by its laws rather than by their own wickedness, so great was the fear our ancestors aroused in the wicked, and such was the memorial to their own virtue and moderation that they left in this place.

[39] As I said, such was the institution they put in charge of overseeing public order. This Council considered it simple ignorance if someone thought that the best men are found in cities with the most precise laws. In that case nothing would prevent all the Greeks from being alike, since written laws are easily borrowed from each other. [40] But progress in virtue comes not from these but from everyday activities: most people turn out to conduct themselves according to the habits in which they were educated. Second, a large number of specific laws is a sign that a city is badly governed, for in erecting these obstacles to crime, people are forced to make many laws. [41] Those who are properly governed do not need to fill the stoas with written [laws][29] but to have justice in their souls. Cities are well governed not

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[27] For the history of the Areopagus Council, see the Introduction.

[28] See above, 37n.

[29] The laws of Athens were written on stone slabs set up in different places, especially Stoa Basileios. Written laws were deemed to ensure justice; cf. Gorgias, *Palamedes* 30; Solon Fr. 36 W = Arist., *Ath. Pol.* 12.4; Euripides, *Suppliants* 433–437; Harris 1989: 75; and Thomas 1989: 32; also Thomas 1995: 74, which argues that the monumental inscription of law served not only to fix it publicly but also to accord it the impressiveness and respect accorded to oral law. Unwritten law was deemed to govern the ideals and conventions of social life, such as respect for the old, so that *nomos* continued to signify both "law" and "convention"; see Thomas 1989: 31. According to Plutarch, Lycurgus refused to put Sparta's laws

by legislation but by customs, and those who have been badly brought up will venture to transgress even meticulously written laws, whereas those who have been well educated will be willing to obey even simple laws. [42] This was the understanding of our ancestors when they considered in the first place not how to punish the disorderly but how to produce citizens who would not commit crimes meriting punishment. They regarded this as their main task and thought eagerness for punishment was appropriately left to people's enemies. [43] They were concerned about all the citizens, but especially the younger ones. They saw that people of such an age are most undisciplined and full of many desires and that their souls require taming through the cultivation of the finest practices and pleasant tasks. These alone hold the attention of men who have been raised as free citizens and are accustomed to noble thoughts. [44] It was not possible to prepare everyone for the same occupations since their circumstances were different; so instead, they gave each an occupation that fit his economic situation. Those who had fewer means, they directed to farming and trade, knowing that poverty stems from idleness, and crime, from poverty. [45] By removing the origin of wickedness, they thought they would also remove the other crimes which attend it. Those who had sufficient means were forced to occupy themselves with horse training, gymnastics, hunting, and philosophy, seeing that some people achieve preeminence through these pursuits and others refrain from the majority of vices.[30]

[46] After enacting these ordinances, they did not spend the rest of their time idly, but after dividing the city into districts, and the country into demes, they watched over the life of each person[31] and brought those who violated public order before the Council. The

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into writing because he deemed it better to have the laws fixed *within* the citizens by education; for Sparta's legislator, education was the greatest and noblest task (*Lycurgus* 13.1–14.1; also Plut., *Moralia* 780C).

[30] For the idea that different sorts of education preparing for different "careers" are suited to different classes of citizen, where class is determined by wealth, see also 15.304. For the apportioning of employment as a feature of conservative ideology, see Wallace 1985: 148–152.

[31] Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 42) informs us that each district appointed guardians to supervise the young even later on.

Council reprimanded some, threatened others, and punished some as was fitting. They knew that there are two ways, both to encourage injustice and to restrain wrongdoing. [47] Where no vigilance has been established over such things and judgments are not strict, even those with honest natures are corrupted, but where it is not easy for wrongdoers to escape notice or to be pardoned when they are caught, there corrupt natures are destroyed. Our ancestors knew these things and kept the citizens in check by both means, by punishments and by watchful discipline. Not only were those who had done wrong inevitably detected, but they even saw ahead of time who was likely to do something wrong.

[48] Therefore, the young did not spend time in the gambling houses, or with flute girls,[32] or in such gatherings as those in which they now spend their days.[33] Instead, they spent all their time in activities that were assigned to them, admiring and competing with the best in these pursuits. They so strenuously avoided the *agora,* that even when they were forced to pass through it, they clearly did so with great embarrassment and modesty. [49] They thought it more shocking to talk back to their elders, or to abuse them verbally, than it is now to wrong one's parents. No one, not even an honest slave, dared to eat or drink in a tavern. They took life seriously, and did not make it a joke. Our ancestors regarded those who were witty and had a facility for jesting, whom people now call "gifted" (*euphyeis*), as unfortunate.[34]

[50] No one should think that I have something against young people. I do not hold them responsible for what's happening, and I am aware that most of them are not at all pleased with this state of

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[32] Respectable girls and women remained indoors in sections of houses specifically reserved for them; flute girls were entertainers at male gatherings, such as symposia, and provided sexual services.

[33] Cf. 15.286–287.

[34] Cf. the description of the moral climate at Athens with 15.283 and 286, and see 8.14 for criticisms of comic excess. Aristotle speaks of the buffoon as being inferior to the comic (*geloios*) (*NE* 1128a33–34). Buffoons exceed the limits of comedy, are base, boorish, and rough (1128a5–9) and are to be aligned with those who are slavish in nature and uncultured; they are also defined by distinction from the free, the reasonable (*epieikēs*), and the cultured citizen (1128a18–22; also 1128a30–31).

affairs, which permits them to spend time in these excesses. It would not be reasonable to criticize them, but it would be fairer to blame those who managed the state a little before our time. [51] These were the ones who encouraged them to these acts of contempt and undid the power of the Areopagus. As long as it had authority, Athens was not filled with lawsuits, accusations, taxes (*eisphorai*), poverty, or wars, but the people lived at ease with one another and maintained peace with all others. They earned the trust of the Greeks and the fear of the barbarians, [52] for they had saved the former and had punished the latter so severely that they were pleased if they suffered no further harm.

For these reasons, our ancestors lived so securely that their homes and other buildings in the country were finer and more splendid than those inside the city walls, and many of the citizens did not come to the city for the festivals but elected to stay at home and enjoy their private blessings rather than share in public benefits.[35] [53] For they did not conduct festivals extravagantly or conspicuously, which would induce them to visit, but sensibly. They judged happiness (*eudaimonia*) not by processions, or competitiveness in the financing of choruses,[36] or such acts of ostentation, but by sober government, by the conduct of daily life, and by the elimination of need. By these standards one must judge those who are truly fortunate and do not live vulgarly. [54] These days what sensible individual would not be upset at what is happening when he sees many citizens drawing lots at the entrance of the courts to see whether they will have the necessities of life or not,[37] while they agree to support other Greeks who are willing

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[35] Classical authors celebrate Athens for the number and quality of its festivals; see Thuc. 2.38 (for festivals as a relief from labor); Isoc. 4.43–46; Pseudo-Xen., *Ath. Pol.* 3.8.

[36] The financing of choruses (*chorēgia*) was one of the liturgic obligations undertaken by the wealthier members of the Athenian community. Litigants often attested to their good citizenship by citing past liturgic undertakings; e.g., Lys. 7.31, 12.20, 19.57–56, 21.1–11; cf. 19, 25.12, 26.3.

[37] Upon Pericles' completion of the Ephialtean reforms, which ensured wider participation in political process, jurors earned two obols a day (later increased by three by Cleon)—a living wage—for jury service. See 8.130, 15.152, and Aristoph., *Wasps* 303–306, for the negative consequences of jury pay.

to row ships; dancers on stage in golden cloaks, even as they spend the winter in unspeakable garments, and [to tolerate] other such contradictions in the management of the city which bring great shame upon Athens?

[55] None of this happened under that Council [i.e., the Areopagus]. For it relieved the poor from their poverty by providing work and benefits from the rich; it relieved the young from unruliness by giving them occupations and keeping watch over them; it relieved those engaged in government from seeking profit by setting penalties and not allowing wrongdoers to go unnoticed; it relieved the old from despair by granting them public honors and ensuring that the young took care of them. How could a constitution be more worthy than this one which watched over everything so well?

[56] We have discussed most of the basic features of that government. From what has been said it is easy to comprehend what I omitted, because it is of the same kind. But while some people who have already heard me describe this constitution have praised it to the limits and have congratulated our ancestors for governing Athens in this manner, [57] they did not think, however, that you would be persuaded to adopt it but would prefer through force of habit to suffer misfortune under your current government than to lead a better life with a more discriminating constitution. They said that although I gave the best counsel, I was in danger of appearing to be an antipopulist and of seeking to turn Athens into an oligarchy. [58] If I were speaking about matters unfamiliar and not of common understanding, and urged you to select a committee (*synedros*) or commissioners (*syngraphoi*) on these matters—bodies which had previously destroyed the democracy—[38] this criticism would be fair. But in fact, I have said no such thing. I have discussed a government that is not hidden but open to all, [59] which you all know was our fatherland and was responsible for the greatest goods for Athens and for the rest of Greece. In addition, it was established and its laws written by men

[38] Isocrates refers to the crisis of 411, when the Four Hundred established a commission to establish a definitive constitution (see *Ath. Pol.* 29.2–30.9), and 404, when a commission of thirty men, who would become the Thirty tyrants, were selected to make the constitution conform to tradition, i.e., more conservative (see Xen., *Hellenica* 2.3.2 and 11).

whom everyone would agree to be the most democratic of the citizens. Hence it would be a terrible wrong if by introducing such a constitution, I should appear to desire revolution.[39]

[**60**] Furthermore, it is easy to recognize my intentions from this. In most of my previous speeches, I clearly condemn oligarchy and political advantage (*pleonexia*), and praise equality (*isotētas*) and democracy—not all democracies randomly, but giving just and sensible praise to those which are well established. [**61**] I know that under this constitution our ancestors far excelled others and that the Spartans are best governed because they are most democratic. For in the selection of public offices, in their daily life, and in their other practices, we would see that fairness (*isotēs*) and uniformity (*homoiotēs*)[40] have greater priority among them than among others. Oligarchies are hostile to these principles, but those who have well-ordered democracies continue to employ them. [**62**] If we want to examine the most renowned and greatest of other states, we will find that democracy provides more benefits than oligarchy. For if we compare our constitution (which all criticize) not to the one I've described but to the one established by the Thirty, there is no one who would not think it divinely inspired. [**63**] And even if some people say that I am straying from my theme, I want to show and explain how greatly this government surpasses that one (of the Thirty), so that no one will think that I am scrutinizing the mistakes of this democracy while omitting any of its fine or noble achievements. My account will not be long or without benefit for my listeners.

[**64**] When we lost our ships near the Hellespont and Athens experienced those disasters,[41] which of the older men among us does not know that the so-called "populists" (*dēmotikoi*) were ready to go to

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[39] The phrase *neōterōn . . . pragmatōn* (lit. "new matters") denotes revolutionary events; see, e.g., Herod. 5.19.2, 5.35.4; Xen., *Hellenica* 5.2.9. It reflects a familiar classical Athenian anxiety about what is unprecedented or novel in political circumstances; cf., e.g., 15.159–161 and 317.

[40] At Sparta, the *homoioi* or "peers" were the citizens who had the right to hold state offices (Xen., *Hellenica* 3.3.5 and Arist., *Ath. Pol.* 1306b30). With his praise of Sparta, Isocrates aligns himself with a more conservative, because selective, government.

[41] Isocrates uses a common euphemism to refer to the devastating defeat by the Spartans at Aegospotami in 405 at the end of the Peloponnesian War.

any length to avoid doing what the enemy ordered and thought it would be terrible if anyone should see the city which had ruled Greece now subject to others, while those who desired oligarchy were ready to destroy the city walls and endure slavery?[42] [**65**] Or that when the people controlled the government, we guarded the acropolises of other cities, but when the Thirty took over the government, the enemy controlled ours?[43] Or that at that time the Spartans were our masters, but when the exiles returned and dared to fight for freedom, and Conon gained his naval victory, ambassadors came from Sparta and gave Athens mastery of the sea?

[**66**] Furthermore, who of my own contemporaries does not remember that the democracy so adorned Athens with temples and public buildings that even now those who visit think it deserves to rule not only Greece but also all others,[44] but that the Thirty neglected the buildings, plundered the temples, and gave away the dockyards to be destroyed for three talents, although the city spent no less than a thousand talents on them? [**67**] And no one would justly praise the mildness of the Thirty as opposed to that of the people. When they took control of Athens by a vote, they put to death fifteen hundred citizens without a trial, and they forced more than five thousand to flee to Piraeus.[45] But when the exiles took power and returned with arms, they put to death only the most guilty criminals and governed the others so well and lawfully that those who had toppled the democracy owned no less than those who returned from exile.[46]

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[42] The Spartan leader Lysander wanted the "long walls" that connected Athens to Piraeus destroyed as a term of peace.

[43] The Spartans stationed a garrison on the Acropolis of Athens in 404 (Xen., *Hellenica* 2.4.10–23).

[44] For similar statements reflecting a hegemonic ideology, see 15.234 and 294, 4.57.

[45] The Thirty ordained death for anyone who remained in Athens with the exception of a small number of citizens known as the Three Thousand; see Lys. 12.95, 13.47, 25.22; Xen., *Hellenica* 4.1. Piraeus, the port of Athens, became a rallying point for the opposition forces.

[46] In 403 a political and economic amnesty was declared so that immunity was granted to citizens (except for the Thirty themselves) who had otherwise committed crimes against the democracy during the oligarchy; see And. 1.20–21 and Plato, *Menexenus* 243e. Aristotle confirms the amicable relations between the parties involved; see *Ath. Pol.* 40.3 and also Dem. 20.11–12.

[68] But the finest and greatest testimony of all to the fairness of the people is that those who remained in the city had borrowed a hundred talents from the Spartans for besieging those who held Piraeus under siege, and that during a meeting of the Assembly concerning the return of the money, many said that those who had borrowed the money, not those who had been besieged, should pay it back. Yet the people decided to use common funds for the repayment. [69] With this decision they fostered such harmony among us and led the city to make such progress that the Spartans, who gave us orders nearly every day under the oligarchy, came as suppliants under the democracy, asking [us] not to sit by and let them be driven from their homes. Such was the essence of the attitudes of each party: the oligarchs wanted to rule the citizens and be slaves to the enemy, whereas the populists wanted to rule others and give equality to the citizens.

[70] I have related these events for two reasons. First, I want to show that I am not a supporter of oligarchies or of their special privileges, but that I desire a just and orderly constitution; second, that badly instituted democracies cause less misfortune ⟨than oligarchies⟩, whereas well-governed ones have the advantage of being more just, more equitable, and more enjoyable for those who live in them. [71] Perhaps, someone might wonder why I seek to persuade you to change from a constitution which has accomplished so many fine things to another, and why, having praised democracy so highly, I change again at whim and criticize and condemn the current order. [72] Well, I blame private citizens if they do a few things right while doing many wrongs, and I consider them worse than they should be; moreover, I reprimand those who come from noble stock and are only a little more decent than the exceptionally wicked and much worse than their fathers, and I would advise them too to stop such conduct. [73] I have the same view of public matters. I think that we must not pride ourselves, or be content if we have been more law-abiding than wretched and insane men, but rather that we should be upset and discontent if we are worse than our ancestors. We must compete with their virtue, not with the evil of the Thirty, especially as it is appropriate for us to be the best of all men.

[74] This is not the first time I have made this argument, but I have already done so many times, before many people. I know that in other places there are fruits, trees, and animals particular to each place that

are far better than those of other lands, and that our land gives birth to and nourishes men who not only have a natural gift for crafts, for politics, or for speaking but also excel others in courage and virtue. [75] It is fair to cite the evidence of the ancient battles they fought against the Amazons, the Thracians, and all the Peloponnesians, and the Persian peril, in which both alone and with the Peloponnesians, fighting on foot and on the sea, they defeated the barbarians and won distinction for their valor.[47] They would have achieved none of these things if they were not naturally superior.

[76] Let no one think that my eulogy is appropriate for our current government; just the opposite. Such speeches praise those who prove themselves deserving of our ancestors' virtue and condemn those who disgrace their good birth by their laziness and cowardice. And this is what I am doing, for the truth will be spoken. Although we have such a nature, we have not preserved it but have fallen into folly, confusion, and desire for evil. [77] But if I continue attacking and condemning those aspects of our current state of affairs, I fear I will stray far from my theme. I have previously spoken about these things,[48] and will do so again, if I do not persuade you to stop making these mistakes.

But for now, I will say a few words on the topic I proposed at the outset, and then, shall give way to those who still wish to offer more advice. [78] If we continue to govern the city as we do now, it is inevitable that we shall take counsel, make war, live, suffer, and do nearly everything just as we now do in the present as in the past. But if we change the constitution, it is clear that by the same logic our situation will become the same as our ancestors'. For the same form of government will necessarily lead to identical or similar political outcomes. [79] We must compare the most important of these outcomes and consider which we should choose.

First, let us consider how the Greeks and barbarians feel about that constitution, and how they now feel toward us. These peoples contribute much to our happiness, when they are well disposed toward us. [80] Now the Greeks had such confidence in those who governed

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[47] This list of Athens' military successes against the Amazons, the Peloponnesians, and the barbarians is a commonplace, especially in the Athenian funeral oration; see, e.g., Lys. 2.4–16 and Plato, *Menexenus* 239b–241c.

[48] At 8.49–56.

at that time that most of them willingly entrusted themselves to our city; and the barbarians were so far from having designs on Greek affairs that they did not sail their long ships on this side of Phaselis,[49] nor did they march their armies beyond the Halys river,[50] but they remained very quiet. [81] Now it has come to the point that the Greeks hate Athens, and the barbarians despise us. You have heard our generals themselves report on the hatred of the Greeks, and the King's feelings are apparent from the letters he has sent.[51]

[82] In addition to these things, under that former discipline the citizens were taught such a degree of virtue that they did not harm each other but fought and defeated all who invaded our land. We are the opposite. Every day we injure each other, and military affairs are so neglected that we do not even dare to participate in the military reviews unless we are paid. [83] But the most important point is that at that time no citizen went without life's necessities, and no one shamed the city begging from passersby, whereas now the needy outnumber those with means. And we can hardly blame them if they disregard public affairs and consider only how to get through each day.

[84] Thus, thinking that, if we imitate our ancestors, we shall be freed from these troubles and become the saviors not only of Athens but also of all Greece, I have therefore come before you and made this speech. You should consider everything I have said, and vote for what you think will be best for Athens.

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[49] According to the agreement known as the Treaty of Callias made in 448, Persia agreed not to venture west of Phaselis, which at the time was the principal commercial port on the East coast of Lycia (in southern Turkey).

[50] The river Halys in Anatolia (modern Turkey) runs north into the Black Sea; today it is known as Kizihrmak.

[51] The Persians sent threatening letters to Athens as Chares had supported the rebel satrap Artabazus; see 10n and Diodorus Siculus 16.22.